

# Muslim Rights In The Schools

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In New York City schools, it is legal to ban the display of a Christian nativity scene while permitting depictions of the Islamic crescent and stars. There are no vouchers or tuition-tax credits for Catholic parents who elect to send their children to parochial schools, but a taxpayer-funded Arabic school has opened in Brooklyn. And the disparity is not confined to New York, or to elementary schools: it's a nationwide phenomenon, and it's happening in grades K-college.

The Khalil Gibran International Academy is New York's first Arabic-themed school; it will serve grades six through twelve, beginning with grade six this year. Named after the Lebanese Christian poet, the school is expected to immerse the students in the Arabic language and culture, without teaching religion. But already there are serious problems.

The woman chosen to run the school, Debbie Almontaser, was pressured to resign in August due to her initial response to a terrorist T-shirt that was being hawked by some of her friends. The T-shirt, which read, "Intifada NYC," was a call to Muslim violence against New York City. When asked what she thought about the shirt, Almontaser played a lawyerly game by instructing New Yorkers that the word "intifada" originally meant a "shaking off" of oppression. But she knew very well that the current meaning is an inflammatory call to arms, which is why she had to apologize after the public uproar. Days later she quit.

The courts are responsible for emboldening these militants. For example, last year the U.S. Supreme Court let stand a decision by the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in favor of a California public school that allows Islamic education.

In that decision, the judges said it was not unconstitutional

to require seventh-grade students to wear Muslim garb, adopt Muslim names, memorize verses from the Quran, pray to Allah, give up something for a day, simulate fasting during the month of Ramadan and play “jihad games.” It is sickening to note that these same judges said it was unconstitutional for public school students to say the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance.

What is worse is what the students are being taught—not only in these schools, but in all schools. In 2003, the American Textbook Council issued a report on the coverage of Islam in seven widely used world history textbooks used in grades seven through twelve. What it found was shocking.

“Textbooks make no distinction between sharia [Islamic] and Western law,” the report said, “and they pretend that women are making great strides in the Islamic world, when all the evidence indicates otherwise.” The report flatly said that “Social studies textbooks ignore the global ambitions of militant Islam. They fail to explain that Muslim terrorists seek to destroy the United States and Israel. They omit geopolitical goals that include theocracy and world domination by religion.”

To show how mainstreamed this propaganda is consider Scholastic publications; they are used in many schools. In the Teacher’s edition of *Junior Scholastic* magazine last year, a recommended resource listed “Ten Things to Know About Islam.” One of the things listed was, “Is Islam Intolerant of Other Religions?” To which students learned that “theologically and historically Islam has a long record of tolerance.” They also learned that “Muslims did not try to impose their religion on others or force them to convert.” However, “No such tolerance existed in Christendom...”

All of this is a lie, and the authors, publishers, principals and teachers know it. If they don’t know it, they should be fired for incompetence.

Why is this happening? Because of multiculturalism, as well as the reality of something more sinister—fear.

According to the theology of multiculturalism, anything associated with the U.S. or Europe is considered suspect at best and fatally flawed at worst. Moreover, anything associated with the non-Christian nations is something we must respect, if not revere. Pope Benedict XVI rightly labels this pathology self-hatred.

Fear is the other factor. When the media refused to reprint the innocent depictions of Muhammad that appeared in the Danish cartoons last year, they said it was because they did not want to offend Muslims unnecessarily. Only the Boston Phoenix told the truth: the publisher was afraid Muslims might kill someone on his staff.

Earlier this year, we raised serious questions about public monies being spent on footbaths for Muslim students at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. The rationale for the footbaths is that it is unsanitary for these students to wash their feet in sinks. Agreed. Which is why I recommended that someone introduce them to shower stalls.

The public sector is obliged to accommodate religion, but it is not obliged—indeed it is wrong—to sponsor it. What we need is equal treatment, and this includes the way religions are treated in textbooks, not just in law.